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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 003807

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STATE PASS AIT/W

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/10/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE DEFENDS CONSTITUTIONAL RHETORIC

REF: A. TAIPEI 3265

[B](#). TAIPEI 3782

[C](#). TAIPEI 3797

[D](#). TAIPEI 3796

[E](#). TAIPEI 2662

Classified By: AIT Deputy Director David J. Keegan, Reason: 1.4 (B/D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Presidential Office Deputy Secretary General James Huang asked AIT to convey a request for USG understanding over President Chen Shui-bian's recent constitution-related campaign rhetoric. Huang acknowledged that some of Chen's recent language had been "a little strong," especially his reference to "putting an end to the Chinese constitution." However, Huang asserted that Chen has been careful to remain within the bounds of his May 20 inaugural policy line in substantive terms. Huang asserted that Chen's approach on the constitution in the campaign has been calibrated to marginalize calls by former President Lee Teng-hui to completely replace the current constitution. Huang said that the Chen administration will seek in the coming days to lay out for AIT and Washington the government's thinking on constitutional reform after December [1](#)1. Huang's comments to AIT came on the same day the president publicly thanked the State Department Spokesman for "welcoming" Chen's November 30 pledge not to go beyond past commitments. End Summary.

Political Calculations

[1](#)2. (C) Presidential Office Deputy Secretary General James Huang asked AIT December 1 to convey to Washington the president's sincerity in abiding by his May 20 inaugural promises. Huang asserted that Chen has been trying to walk a fine line on the constitution issue during the ongoing presidential campaign. On the one hand, Huang claimed that Chen is seeking to fend off attempts by Lee Teng-hui to dominate the constitution debate (Comment: Which coincidentally might also help Lee poach Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) votes for his own Taiwan Solidary Union (TSU) party. End Comment). At the same time, Huang continued, Chen has been careful not to say anything that would substantively alter the limits he imposed on the constitutional revision process on May 20 and in subsequent statements. Huang acknowledged that some of Chen's recent language has been "a little strong," especially his reference to "putting an end to the Chinese constitution." However, he said that this sort of hyperbole is commonplace in Taiwan election campaigns.

[1](#)3. (C) Huang stated that Chen's October 10 reference to "the Republic of China equals Taiwan" (Ref A) and more recent comments about constitutional revision were attempts to undercut Lee's campaign to "establish a new constitution/rectify the name (of the country)" (zhixian zhengming). Huang noted that during Chen's November 27 Taiwan Advocates speech, and in subsequent campaign references to constitutional reform (Ref B), the president had explicitly stated that constitutional reforms would be conducted within the procedures established by the current constitutional framework. Huang added that Chen's decision to attend the November 27 Taiwan Advocates conference was intended to ensure that Lee's constitutional plan did not dominate the weekend headlines.

Taipei Surprised?

[1](#)4. (C) Huang claimed that prior to the State Department Spokesman's November 29 comments (Ref C), the Chen administration was not aware that the USG was concerned over recent rhetoric. He added that Taipei assumed that Washington was less concerned about campaign language than about formal policy statements. In light of the most recent episode, Huang said that there is an internal review underway over how to enhance communications with the U.S.-side over Taipei's intentions on the constitution, both before and after the December 11 election. Huang said that he would likely contact AIT in the next 24-48 hours to convey a more formal message for Washington. Huang added that, in his view, dialogue over the constitution and other sensitive issues should be conducted on a regular basis via existing

AIT/TECRO channels rather than one-off special missions. In this context, Huang said the delegation going to the U.S. after the election (whose members include Presidential Advisor Tsai Ing-wen, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Deputy Secretary General Y.Y. Lee, and Deputy Minister of Defense Michael Tsai) would not be authorized to convey any policy message to the USG. Huang described the group as purely "academic" in nature.

15. (C) AIT responded that while we would welcome enhanced communications, the track record of the past several months has been decidedly mixed. AIT expressed appreciation for the government's willingness to consult in advance about major policy speeches, but pointed out that clarifications over Chen's October 10 "ROC equals Taiwan" and more recent constitutional formulations came only after the fact. This, it was noted, raised questions about whether AIT was being consulted or simply "spun." In addition, AIT was not informed in advance of the president's intention to speak on constitutional revision at Lee Teng-hui's Taiwan Advocates conference. (Note: This is true even though National Security Advisor Chiou I-jen had made a point of reassuring AIT two days earlier concerning Chen's planned campaign event with Lee on December 4 (Ref). End Note.) Huang said Taipei would try to do a better job of keeping AIT abreast of the president's plans. He also reiterated that the only venue where Chen and Lee will appear together between now and election day is at a December 4 evening rally in Kaohsiung City. Huang emphasized that Chen would not take part in the TSU's December 5 "name rectification" rally.

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CSB Reiterates No Changes, "Thanks" Boucher

16. (C) On the same day as Huang's remarks to AIT, President Chen used an open press meeting with the Utah Governor attended by the AIT Director to amplify his November 30 pledge to abide by past commitments regarding constitutional reform (Ref C). Chen explained in detail the process for constitutional revision under the procedures passed in August by the Legislative Yuan (LY) (Ref E). Chen noted that a referendum is stipulated under these provisions, but only after "three out of four" members of the LY approve them. (Note: Chen acknowledged that these new procedures have not yet been approved by a yet-to-be-selected National Assembly. End Note.). During his December 1 remarks, Chen also expressed appreciation for State Department Spokesman Boucher's reported reaction to the president's November 30 clarification. Chen told the press "I have learned that the State Department's Spokesman welcomed my remarks, and I would like to express sincere appreciation for that."

Comment: Damage Control Mode

17. (C) Chen and his aides were clearly spooked by the Spokesman's warning and the widespread media coverage it received in Taipei. Coming the same week that Standard and Poor's cited cross-strait tensions among its reasons for downgrading Taiwan's risk rating, Chen is likely to chart a more cautious rhetorical course in the coming days. The president and his advisors are also likely to seek to enhance consultations with AIT and Washington, if for no other reason than to avoid any further public rebukes. However, we do not accept their claims to be surprised over USG concerns over Chen's recent "campaign rhetoric." AIT has repeatedly emphasized in private to Chen administration officials from the president on down that both Washington and Beijing would pay particular attention to the language used during the legislative campaign. With the president in full election mode, it apparently required a public reminder and accompanying political costs before the president and his advisors chose to moderate his rhetoric.

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